



Maine Farm Safety Program

Bulletin #2355

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General Health for Farmers

Running a productive and successful farm requires healthy workers. Several factors can affect personal health. These include physical well being, knowing limitations, stress, and drugs and alcohol.

◆ **Mind and Body**

Temperature, humidity, soil conditions and terrain affect both human and machine performance. Prepare for the unusual, and expect the unexpected. Mud, rain and bad weather are inevitable. You need proper equipment and know-how to work in these adverse conditions. Use good judgment to recognize unsafe conditions, such as when a slope is too steep to cross safely with a tractor.

Take work breaks to reduce fatigue and monotony. Eat properly, and get sufficient rest. Do not operate equipment when ill or taking medication that might affect your alertness or slow reflex actions. To avoid muscle fatigue, work in a

comfortable position, and work within your limitations. Eating foods high in natural carbohydrates (fruit, breads, etc.) is another excellent way to fight fatigue. Accidents happen when people are overtired, overheated, cold or stressed. Studies show most accidents happen in late morning from 10 to 11 a.m. and late afternoon from 4 to 5 p.m., just before meals. Take a break every couple

General Health for Farmers

- ◆ **Take work breaks, and always use good judgment.**
- ◆ **Dress properly for the job.**
- ◆ **Keep up with tetanus boosters every 10 years.**
- ◆ **Alcohol and some medicinal drugs will slow reflexes. Keep this in mind when near any work site if these are in your system.**



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Be nice to yourself. Get away from it all periodically. Do things you enjoy to restore body and soul.

hours. Get off the machines, walk around and attempt to get refreshed. No one should feel guilty for taking a break. Refreshed workers mean higher productivity and less accidents.

Stay healthy by staying clean. Cleanliness is an important means of preventing the spread of disease. Areas should be designated where workers can wash off soil, chemicals and animal waste. Water may be needed to wash and cleanse chemical spills occurring on the body and eyes.

Monitor your employees' emotional health. An angry person tends to overreact and many take this frustration out on people, animals or objects that happen to be handy. An upset person is at risk for poor judgment and may take chances. Keep an angry worker off farm equipment, and any other potentially hazardous equipment. Cool down before getting back to work.

◆ **Know Your Physical Limits**

Exceeding personal limitations is a factor in many farm accidents. Working in extreme heat or cold or attempting jobs beyond your physical capabilities elevates accident or illness risk.

Be ready for a safe day. This includes dressing right for the weather and job, getting the proper nourishment and adequate rest. Take work breaks to fight fatigue and

extend your energy. Don't try to be Super Farmer. Stop when you've had enough.

If it will be a struggle to lift or carry something, get help. Be sure you have the necessary competence (strength, skill and staying power) required by the job or activity to do it well and safely. Find the least taxing way to do things. Use motor power rather than muscle power when possible. Plan your work to make maximum use of your available energy.

Consider age and state of health in deciding what and how much you can do safely. Be willing to reassign jobs and activities that can no longer be done safely because of age or health problems. Exercise regularly for improved cardiovascular fitness, muscle tone, and to stay agile.

◆ **Stress**

Farming is a physically and mentally demanding occupation. Add economic uncertainty, unpredictable weather and the usual array of life problems that confront most of us, and you'll find high stress in farming communities. Strive for a positive mental attitude. Learn to accept what cannot be changed.

Take good care of your physical health. A worker who



feels good and has energy to think and act clearly will be better able to handle stresses of everyday life and come up with better solutions to problems. Set realistic, attainable goals for yourself.

◆ **Immunizations**

Get a tetanus booster every 10 years. If the booster is five years or older at the time of injury, then another should be administered. Most other shot series are finished by the time one is an adult. If this is not the case, get the recommended shots as soon as possible.

◆ **Alcohol and Drugs**

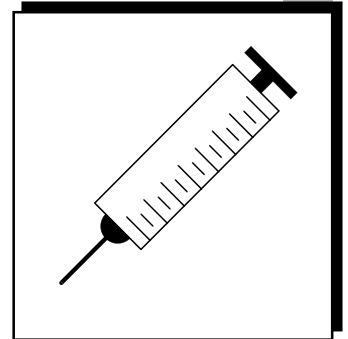
Human reaction time to the unexpected is about one second. Fatigue, medicine, alcohol and preoccupation affect reaction time. Reaction time may be lengthened in a panic situation. Keeping alcohol free and drug free will help to make a safer working environment.

Smoking reduces work capacity as much as 10 percent because of carbon monoxide in the smoker's blood. Tobacco smoke contains up to four percent carbon monoxide. Blood absorbs carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide has a greater attraction to the hemoglobin of

blood than oxygen does. It remains in the blood during respiration. Blood carrying carbon monoxide can't be used for respiration. A smoker becomes short-winded and has reduced work capacity, especially right after smoking, because of the decreased oxygen carrying capacity.

Any amount of alcohol in the blood affects human coordination and reflexes. As the amount of alcohol in the blood goes up, performance goes down. High alcohol levels affect judgment. Alcohol is a contributing cause in thousands of fatal accidents each year.

Drugs range from aspirin to heroin. They all alter the body and mind. Hallucinatory drugs have direct and devastating effects on the person using them. There is also a secondary danger. A person using drugs may not recognize a dangerous situation. Many prescription and over-the-counter medications can slow reflexes. These have warnings included on the packaging. Read the warnings on all medications including over-the-counter ones and heed them.





This Maine Farm Safety Fact Sheet is part of an educational fact sheet series produced by the University of Maine Cooperative Extension. For more information on farm safety, contact your county Extension office.



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